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THE STEPPES OF SOUTHERN RUSSIA.

The physical peculiarities of the southern provinces of Russia are likely to exercise no little influence on the future development of that vast empire, and as few books of real value have appeared on the subject in England, we believe we shall do a welcome service to our readers by condensing for them the information contained in a work* recently published in Germany, by a gentleman who resided many years in different parts of the Czar's dominions, and was himself a frequent witness to the scenes he describes.

The steppes as they are generally called, extend from the borders of Hungary to those of China. They constitute an almost uninterrupted plain, covered in spring and autumn by a luxuriant herbage; in winter by drifting snows, heaped up in some places, and leaving the ground bare in others; and in summer by clouds of dust so excessively fine, that even on the calmest day they hang suspended in the air, having the appearance rather of a vapour exhaled from the ground, than of earthy particles raised by the agitation of the atmosphere. The slight undulations that occasionally occur assume but rarely the character of hills, but artificial hillocks or tumuli are frequently met with, the origin of which it is impossible to trace through the darkness of by-gone ages. The most singular characteristic, however, of the steppe, is the total absence of trees, on a soil remarkable for its richness and the luxuriance of its herbage. For hundreds of miles, a traveller may proceed in a straight line without encountering even a bush, unless he happen to be acquainted with the few favoured spots known to the Tartar sportsmen, to whom they answer the purpose of game preserves. Countless herds of cattle roam over these noble pasture grounds, on which a calf born at the foot of the Great Chinese Wall, might eat his way along till he arrived a well-fattened ox on the banks of the Dniester, prepared to figure with advantage at the Odessa market. The poor animals suffer much during the hot and dry summers, when every blade of grass is parched up; but the careful herdsman, who has provided himself with an abundant stock of hay, is able to keep his beasts alive till autumn returns to gladden them with fresh abundance.

Wherever a ridge of hills occurs, of sufficient height to afford protection against the northern blasts that come sweeping in an unbroken course from the shores of the Arctic Ocean, the character of the country is changed. In the Crimea, for instance, though the northern portion partakes of all the rude characteristics of the steppe, the south coast, sheltered by the central mountains, enjoys a climate equal to that of Italy, and allows the vine and the olive to be cultivated with as much success as in Provence. What these mountains are to the southern coast of the Crimea, the Himalayas are to India, which, if divested of her mountain fence and laid open to the breath of the North Pole, would soon be converted into a new steppe; the icy blast driven far into the tropics would quickly sweep her jungles and pagodas from the earth, and her fair fields, invaded by the Tartar and his herds, would cease to excite the cupidity of foreign adventurers.

A country constituted by nature as are the Russian steppes is evidently destined rather for a wandering and pastoral people, than for a settled and agricultural population; for in regions whe e but prominent objects occur, there is but little o attach man to any particular spot. The Russian government, however, in a spirit of perversity not unusual in governments over which public opinion exercises but little influence, appears to have prescribed to itself the task of converting the nomadic tribes into settled agriculturists, and the steppe itself into one vast cornfield. German and Bulgarian colonists have been tempted, by the offer of peculiar privileges, to establish themselves in different parts of the country, in the hope that their example might gradually wean the native tribes from their roving habits. Where the colonists have been located in the vicinity of large towns, the plan has been attended with partial success; but the foreigners soon discover the capabilities of the country, and, in proportion as their means increase, rarely fail to invest their surplus capital in the purchase of flocks and herds, the numerical amount of which constitutes the customary standard by which wealth is estimated throughout the steppe.

We have described the steppes as one vast plain, but it must be borne in mind that this plain is of an elevated character, and terminates at the Black Sea in an abrupt terrace, rising above the water to the height of from 120 to 180 feet. The rivers which intersect this plain, and which in spring are swollen by the rapid thaw of the accumulated snows of winter, cut deep furrows in the surface, and as they frequently change their courses, they occasionally leave dry ravines that break in some measure the uniformity of the country. Little importance would be attached in other parts of the world to the trifling elevations and depressions thus formed; but in the steppe, the slightest variation of surface becomes a landmark of importance, and separate denominations are given by the inhabitants to every peculiarity of shape which the ground is made to assume under the action of water.

The rain-water flows but slowly away from the level surface of the steppe, and often, after a succession of rainy weather, remains for many days upon the ground, to the depth of several inches. A portion of this water is absorbed by the soil, but the greater part finds its way slowly and imperceptibly into the rivers, carrying along with it a sufficient quantity of earth to impart a black and turbid look to all the streams that intersect the steppe. Many of the rivers, indeed all but the principal streams, are fed only by the rain and snow, and their beds, consequently, are dry in summer. Each of these ravines terminates in a waterfall, formed originally, no doubt, by the terrace that bounds the sea; but in proportion as the water wore away a channel for itself, the waterfall gradually receded, and, in the course of ages, made its way farther and farther into the interior of the country. In some instances this gradual retrogression of the waterfall or termination of the river-bed, is sufficiently rapid to be noticed by the inhabitants who frequently pretend to be able to determine the average number of feet which a ravine works its way backward year by year.

The elevation of the ground, being so nearly alike throughout the whole of the steppe, the ravines formed by the action of the rain-water are of nearly equal depth in every part of the country. They are seldom less than a hundred feet deep, and seldom exceed a hundred and fifty. These ravines, or *vulpolotsh*, with their lateral branches on each side, as their edges are at all times exceedingly abrupt, offer to the traveller, as well as to the herdsman driving his lowing and bleating charge across the plain, an impassable barrier, to avoid which it is often necessary to go round for many miles. The consequence is, that several roads or tracks are always sure to meet at the head of a vulpolotsh, which thus becomes a spot of some importance throughout the surrounding country. In winter, the ravine is usually filled by the drifting snow, and is then extremely dangerous to any one not well acquainted with the country. Men and cattle are at that season often buried in the snow-drifts, and their fate is ascertained only when the melting of the snow leaves their bodies exposed at the foot of the precipice.

The above description does not, of course, apply to the larger rivers that are supplied with water throughout the year. The banks of these are less abrupt, but their elevation, though more gradual, is about the same, being seldom less than a hundred, nor more than a hundred and fifty, feet over the level of the water. The beds of these large rivers are in general remarkably broad, and are almost always fringed with a belt of reeds, six or eight feet high, that forms an excellent cover for every description of water-fowl.

While the action of the rain is exercising so powerful an influence in the interior, the sea, as may easily be supposed, is not idle on the coast. A very remarkable characteristic of the Black Sea is, that at the mouth of every river, a large lake is gradually formed by the action of the sea. If any of our readers will take up a map of the Black Sea, they will perceive a lake of some extent laid down at the mouth of almost every river, and some of these lakes, it will be seen, are marked as unconnected with the sea. These lakes are known along the coast by the name of *liman*. These limans, Mr. Kohl supposes to have been formed by the action of the sea driven into the mouth of the river by the violence of the prevailing storms, and constantly undermining the terrace of the overhanging steppe. During tranquil weather, an opposite action is going on. The rivers, as we have above said, are always turbid with the soil of the steppe, and their water, arrested in its course by the tideless sea, deposits its sediment in front of the liman, where a low

* Reisen in Süd-Russland, von J. G. Kohl. Two volumes. Leipzig. 1841.

strip of land is gradually formed. This natural mound, by which every liman is in course of time protected against the farther encroachments of the sea, is called a *perissip*. Where the supply of water brought down by a river is tolerably large, the perissip is never complete, but is broken by an aperture called a *gheerl*, that forms a communication between the liman and the sea. Many limans, however, are fed by streams that bring down so feeble a volume of water, that the mere evaporation is sufficient to carry off the whole surplus, and the perissip in such cases becomes perfect, forming a barrier that completely cuts off all communication between the river and the sea. Limans so circumstanced exercise a baneful influence upon the country, in consequence of the offensive effluvia that arise from the stagnant water in summer. All the inhabitants of a village, we are assured, have fallen sick in a single night, when the wind has happened to blow upon them from one of these putrid lakes.

Occasionally, in passing over the steppe, the traveller perceives a slight depression of the surface, as if a mighty giant had laid his hand upon the plain and pressed it down. In such natural basins, called *stavoks* by the natives, the rain collects, and though the soil soon absorbs the water, the place generally retains some moisture long after the rest of the country has been parched up by the summer heats. The stavok, it may easily be supposed, is, at such a time, an object of no trifling importance to the herdsman, and is carefully guarded against the intrusion of strangers. A belief prevails upon the steppe, that the stavoks are holes formed by the ancient Mongolians, who dug out the earth to form their tumuli, but there is no good reason to suppose that the depression has originated otherwise than by a slight sinking of the subjacent strata.

The climate of the steppes is one of extremes. In summer, the heat is as intense as the cold is severe in winter, the waters of the Black Sea exercising apparently but little influence in tempering the atmosphere. This is accounted for by the abrupt rise of the coast, which arrests the strata of air immediately above the surface of the water, and leaves a *free course* only to those portions of the air that fly at a higher level. The steppe therefore has, usually, an arctic winter, and a tropical summer, and enjoys, only during spring and autumn, short intervals of that moderate temperature to which its geographical position, in the temperate zone, would appear to entitle it.

The core or substance of the long winter of the steppe is formed by the three months of December, January, and February, during which all the energies of nature appear sunk in an unbroken sleep: but though unbroken, it is by no means a quiet sleep that Dame Nature is allowed to enjoy during this period of the year, for the snow storms are of frequent occurrence, and so excessively violent, that even the most seasoned veterans of the steppe stand in awe of them. The Russians distinguish these snow-storms into three separate classes. A storm during which the snow simply falls from the clouds is called a *myattyol;* a storm that raises the snow from the ground, and drives it in large masses before the wind, is called a *zamet;* but the storm which combines the characters of both the foregoing, and which goes by the name of a *viuga*, is the dreaded foe against which all hasten to seek shelter. A zamet is not without its beauties when contemplated from the summit of a tumulus or from some other accidental elevation; the sun may then be seen shining brilliantly overhead, its rays reflected by myriads of icy crystals floating in the air below. For the traveller, however, who does not happen to look down upon it, but, on the contrary is closely cultivating its acquaintance, the zamet has few charms and is not unattended by danger. Every road or track is frequently altogether effaced, the ravines are filled up, and cases even occur where men and cattle are suddenly caught by a drift of snow, and completely buried under its accumulating mass. To the viuga no traveller attempts to expose himself, and even the government couriers are excused if, during the three days, the usual duration of one of these storms, they remain closely housed at the station which they happen to have reached.

The winter of the steppe, in intensity of cold, frequently surpasses the severest seasons known on the shores of the Baltic, and the cutting blasts from the north, sweeping huge masses of snow into the Black Sea, often cover it with a thick coating of ice for many leagues from the shore. In the winter between 1837 and 1838, the maximum height of the thermometer for four weeks was—10° R., and several times it fell below—30° (32° below the zero of Fahrenheit,) a temperature at which, in St. Petersburg, it is customary to close churches and theatres. The steppe, accordingly participates in all the severity of a Russian winter, but enjoys few of the advantages which to the northern Russian go far to redeem the intensity of the cold. In northern Russia, and even in the Ukraine, the snow remains on the ground during the greater part of the winter, and the sledges quickly wear the surface of the road into a smooth mass of ice, over which the heaviest goods may be transported with a speed and facility surpassed only by a railroad. The Russian, therefore, usually prefers the winter months, not only for traveling, but also for the conveyance of heavy goods from one place to another. To the denizen of the steppe this natural railroad is unknown. The storms that prevail throughout the greater part of the winter keep the snow in a constant state of agitation, and prevent it from "caking" on the ground. The snow in consequence never covers the steppe, but seems to lie scattered over it in patches, according as the wind may have drifted it about.

When the snow melts on the steppe, the spring may be said to commence. This usually takes place in April; but May is sometimes far advanced before the mass of water has had time to find its way into the rivers. During this *melting season*, the whole surface of the steppe is converted into a sea of mud, through which neither man nor beast can wade without positive danger. Through every ravine rushes a torrent of the dirtiest water that can well be imagined, and about the dwellings of men the accumulated filth of the winter is at once exposed to view, by the disappearance of the snowy mantle that, for a season, had charitably covered a multitude of sins. This operation is frequently interrupted by the return of frost, and the descent of fresh masses of snow, for there is no country, perhaps, where winter makes a harder fight for it, before he allows himself to be beaten out of the field. For a few days, perhaps, a delightful south wind will diversify the plain with tulips, crocusses, and hyacinths; then all at once a rude northeaster will come scouring from the Ural mountains, making the flowers vanish in a trice, and enveloping the whole scene anew in one white shroud; another shift of the wind, and a gale from the northwest will come sweeping along, discharging its heavy clouds, and washing the face of the steppe from the Ural to the Carpathians. When at last boisterous old Hyems has really been forced to beat his retreat, a most delightful period of the year succeeds, and the steppe, covered with a beautiful and luxuriant herbage, smiles like a lovely oasis between the parched desolation of the summer and the dreary waste of the winter. The whole earth now seems clad in the colour of Hope, while the sky assumes that of Truth; and though it is certainly monotonous enough to behold nothing but blue above and green below, yet the recollection of past hardships and the consciousness of present abundance, make the season one of rejoicing to the native, and even excite for a while the admiration of the stranger. The latter, however, is certain, before long, to grow weary of a spring unadorned by a single flowering shrub, unvaried by a single babbling brook. Not a hill to break the tedium of the landscape, through which a well-mounted rider may gallop for hundreds of leagues, and scarcely meet an object to make him conscious that he has quitted the spot whence he started! From Hungary, he may urge his steed to the borders of Circassia without passing one grove of trees; from the Carpathians to the capital of Mongolia he will not once be gladdened by the sound of a streamlet murmuring over its pebbly bed. Grass, grass, grass—and nothing but grass! Nor must this grass be supposed to resemble that which embellishes the velvet lawn of an English park. The herbage of the steppe is so coarse, that an English labourer would have to look long before he found a place soft enough for an afternoon nap; and then, the tulips and hyacinths must not be judged of by the beautiful specimens reared by a Dutch florist.

Thunder and lightning are frequent throughout May, but a thunder-storm on the steppe is, comparatively, but a poor kind of spectacle, there being neither trees nor rocks for the lightning to show his might upon, nor mountains, by their reverberating echoes, to give increased majesty to the pealing artillery of heaven; but these discharges of atmospheric electricity, though they want the grandeur of the alpine tempest, are dear to the people of the steppe, where they are always accompanied either by showers or night dews, so that as long as it thunders there is no lack of fodder for their cattle. In June, the lightning ceases to play, and the periodical drought announces its approach, the whole month passing frequently away without depositing a particle of moisture on the ground. The consequences of this begin to manifest themselves in July, when the heated soil cracks in every direction, opening its parched lips in supplication for a few drops of water that are not vouchsafed. Heavy and tantalising clouds, it is true, sweep over the steppe, but instead of showering their blessings on the thirsty land, hurry away to the Carpathian mountains or to the sea. The sun at this season rises and sets like a globe of fire, but the evaporations raised from the earth by the mid-day heat seldom fail to give a misty appearance to the sky towards noon. The heat, meanwhile, is rendered intolerable by its duration, for any thing like a cool interval never occurs, and shade is not to be thought of in a country where hills and trees are alike unknown. This season is one of great suffering to all living beings on the steppe. Every trace of vegetation is singed away, except in a few favoured spots; the surface of the ground becomes browner and browner, and at last completely black. Men and cattle assume a lean and haggard look, and the wild oxen and horses, so fierce and ungovernable in May, become as tame as lambs in July, and can scarcely crawl in August. Even the tanned skin of the poor *Kakhols* (as the Russians call the inhabitants of the steppe,) hangs in wrinkled folds upon their hollow cheeks; their steps are feeble, and every thing about them assumes a dejected and melancholy look. Ponds dry up, wells cease to furnish water, and the beds of lakes are converted into sandy hollows. Water now rises in price, and becomes an article which it is worth a thief's while to steal. The few springs that continue to yield must have a guard set upon them night and day, or the legitimate owner will scarcely keep enough to slake his own thirst. At this season, thousands of cattle perish on the steppe of thirst, while, as if to mock their sufferings, the horizon seems laden with humid clouds, and the parched soil assumes to the cheated eye in the distance the appearance of crystal lakes and running streams. Such is the faithful picture of a dry summer on the steppe, but, of course, the description does not apply every year. The years 1837 and 1838, for instance, were remarkable for their humidity; but, in general, the summer is a period of wretchedness over the whole face of the steppe, and three or four thirst-and-hunger summers frequently suc-

ceed each other. The following description of the summer of 1833 is given by an eye-witness:—

"The last rain fell early in May, and throughout the summer the whole steppe presented an endless black plain, in which the eye sought in vain for a green spot. Scarcely a breath of wind ever stirred, and the nights were as sultry as the days. However exhausted the frame might be, it was scarcely possible to obtain any refreshing sleep. The moment either man or beast stirred, a thick black cloud was raised from the ground; nor could even a bird rise without filling the atmosphere with a column of what looked more like smoke than dust. Even the plants that were most carefully tended by the hand of man had a sickly look. The wheat, that usually rises to so luxuriant a height, scarcely peeped from its furrows, with its red blades and cornless ears. The hunger and thirst of the poor horses rose to a scarcely credible pitch, and the wretched animals were only kept alive by driving them into the corn-fields, to crop what had been intended as food for man. The few wells from which water could be obtained were guarded against intrusion by locks, and chains, and bars; but these were broken without hesitation, and even where sentinels had been set, they were driven away by the famishing multitude. All business was at a stand-still, for no merchant could venture to send a caravan from the coast, when it was known that a draught of water could not be had by the traveller without fighting for it. Many of the *tuboons** were broken up altogether, the animals refusing to submit to any control, and dispersing in different directions in search of water. Straggling horses were everywhere to be met with, rushing madly up the ravines, and sniffing the air in search of a few drops of moisture to cool their burning thirst."

In many respects, the summer on the steppe is more cruel even than in the Sahara of Africa, or in the Llanos of Spanish America, for in neither of these does the moisture so completely disappear from the soil, and in the African desert, wherever there is water, a little terrestrial paradise of date trees and flowering shrubs is certain to be grouped around; but in the steppe, even the rivers flow only between grass, and reeds are the only shrubs by which the banks are fringed, while from the parched and gaping earth not even a cactus or an aloe peeps forth, into which a thirsty animal might bite to moisten its lips with the juice.

In August, the dryness of the atmosphere reaches the extreme point; but before the end of the month, the night dews set in, and thunder-storms are occasionally followed by rain. The leaden dusky sky becomes clear and blue again, and every thing reminds you that the delights of autumn are approaching. The temperature of September is mild and refreshing, and the detestable black dust of the steppe, kept down by frequent showers, no longer gives to every creature the complexion of a negro. A fresh green herbage quickly covers the whole plain, and man and beast in a short while recover their strength and spirits. Could Darius and his troops, when they invaded Scythia, but have endured the thirst of July, they might easily have kept their ground in September, and would have had abundant leisure to prepare their winter quarters.

Delightful the autumn of the steppe unquestionably is, but short and fleeting are its charms, for October is already a gusty Scythian month, marked by cold rains and fogs, and usually closing amid *samets* and *viugas;* and as to November, that is set down as a winter month even by the most seasoned Russian, and the severest weather of an English January might almost be deemed autumnal, compared to the cold that often prevails at Odessa in November.

One of the first words that a stranger learns in the steppe is *burian*. The constant topic of the farmer's lamentations is *burian;* and the gardener, the herdsman, and the herd, join with equal bitterness in heaping maledictions on the detested *burian*. The curiosity of every new arrival is, therefore, soon excited by an expression of such constant occurrence, and after some inquiry he finds that every plant or herb on which the cattle will feed is known by the general name of *trava*, and that every woody, wiry stem, from which they turn away, is ruthlessly classed in the condemned list of *burian*. Weeds of various kinds are indeed, of frequent occurrence, owing to the salt and acrid nature of the soil; and many, which with us remain modestly concealed by the grass, shoot up into bushes on the steppe, driving the gardener and the husbandman to despair, and seldom rendering any other service either to man or beast than that of helping to boil the Russian's national dish of *borsht*. The thistle deserves the first place among the *burian* of the steppe. We have but little notion in England of the height to which a thistle will often grow in Southern Russia, where it not unfrequently assumes the form and size of a tree, overshadowing with its branches the low-sunken dwellings of the Troglodytes of the steppe. In places peculiarly favoured by the thistle, this description of *burian* will sometimes grow in such abundance, as to form a little grove, in which a Cossack on his horse may completely hide himself.

Another description of weed that stands in very bad odour in the steppe, has been aptly denominaten wind-witch by the German colonists. This is a worthless plant, that expends all its vigour in the formation of innumerable thread-like fibres, that shoot out in every direction, till the whole forms a light globular form. The little sap to be obtained from this plant is bitterer than the bitterest wormwood, and even in the driest summer no animal will touch the wind-witch. It grows to the height of three feet, and in autumn the root decays, and the upper part of the plant becomes completely dry. The huge shuttlecock is then torn from the ground by the first high wind that rises, and is sent dancing, rolling, and hopping over the plain, with a rapidity which the best mounted rider would vainly attempt to emulate. Hundreds of them are sometimes detached from the ground at once on a windy day, and when seen scouring over the plain, may easily be mistaken at a distance for a taboon of wild horses. The Germans could not have christened the plant more aptly, and in bestowing on it the expressive name by which it is known among them, they no doubt thought of the national legends long associated with the far-famed witch-haunted recesses of the Blocksberg. The wild dances with which fancy has enlivened that ill-reputed mountain are yearly imitated by the wind-witches on the steppe. Sometimes they may be seen skipping along like a herd of deer: sometimes describing wide circles in the grass; sometimes rolling madly over one another; and sometimes rising by hundreds into the air, as though they were just starting to partake in the diabolical festivities of the Blocksberg itself. They adhere to each other sometimes like so many enormous burrs, and it is not an uncommon sight to see some twelve or twenty rolled into one mass, and scouring over the plain like a huge giant in his seven-league boots. Thousands of them are yearly blown into the Black Sea; but with this *salto mortale* ends the witch's career, who loses in the water all the fantastic graces that distinguished her while ashore.

As next in importance among the *burian* of the steppe, the bitter wormwood must not be forgotten. It grows to the height of six feet, and sometimes, in a very dry summer, the cattle will not disdain to eat of it. All the milk and butter then becomes detestably bitter, and sometimes particles of the dry wormwood adhere to the wheat, in which case the bitter flavour of the plant is certain to be imparted to the bread.

Poisonous herbs are but little known in the European steppes, but in those of Asia there is a great abundance of venomous fungi, which spring up in autumn in such quantities, that at times the plain appears to be covered with them as far as the eye can reach. They are mostly white, and sometimes make the steppe in the morning as though there had been a heavy fall of snow during the night. The noon-day heat generally destroys them, but the following night often produces a fresh crop.

We might, of course, extend our list of the botanical peculiarities of the steppe much farther, but, upon the whole, the variety of plants that grow upon this vast grazing land of the Tartars is more limited than would be supposed. Botanists, we believe, reckon only five hundred species as native to the steppe, and each species usually grows in large masses. For leagues together the traveller will see nothing but wormwood; and, on leaving so bitter a specimen of vegetation, he will come to a tulip-bed, covering many thousands of acres; and at the end of that, to an equal extent of wild mignionette, to which cultivation has not, however, imparted the delicious perfume which recommends it to the horticulturist of more civilised lands. For days together, the drosky will then roll over the same description of coarse grass, ungainly to look upon, but on which the sheep thrive admirably, and which is said to give to Tartar mutton a delicious flavour that the traveled epicure vainly looks for in the gorgeous restaurants of Paris, or in that joint-stock association of comfort and luxury, a London club.

A singular phenomenon of the steppe manifests itself when man presumptuously attempts to invade it with his plough. The disturbed soil immediately shoots forth every variety of *burian*, against which the farmer must exert unceasing vigilance, or else farewell to the hope of a productive harvest. If the same land is afterwards left fallow, the *burian* takes possession of the field, and riots for a few years in undisturbed luxuriance. A struggle then goes on for some years longer between the weeds and the grass; but the latter, strange to say, in almost every instance, triumphs in the end, and a beautiful pasture-ground succeeds, which goes on improving from year to year, till it attains its highest degree of perfection. A reaction then ensues. A species of coarse grass, known by botanists under the name of *stipa pinnata*, takes possession of the ground, which it covers with its hard and woody stems, till the farmer, taking advantage of the first dry weather in spring, clears away the whole plantation by setting fire to it.

The burning of the steppe is the only kind of manuring to which it is ever subjected, and is generally executed in the spring, in order that a fresh crop of grass may immediately rise, like a young phœnix, from the ashes. This department of Tartar husbandry is usually managed with much caution, and the conflagration rarely extends beyond the limits intended to be assigned to it; but sometimes a fire arises by accident, or in consequence of a malicious act of incendiarism, and then the "devouring element," as our newspapers call it, rages far and wide, sweeping along for hundreds of leagues, destroying cattle and corn-fields, and consuming not only single houses, but whole villages, in its way. These fires are more particularly dangerous in summer, owing to the inflammable condition, at that season, of almost every description of herbage. The flaming torrent advances then with irresistible force, towering up among the lofty thistles, or advancing with a stealthy snakelike step through the parched grass. Not even the wind can always arrest its destructive course, for a fire of this kind will go steaming in the very teeth of the wind, now slowly and then rapidly, according to the nature of the fuel that supplies its forces. At times the invader finds himself compressed between ravines, and appears to have spent his strength, but a few burning particles blown across by a gust of wind enable him to make good his position on new ground, and he loses no time in availing himself of the opportunity. A well-beaten road, a ravine, or a piece of sunk ground in which some remnant

* Herds of half-wild horses.

of moisture has kept the grass green, are the points of which advantage must be taken if the enemy's advance is to be stopped. At such places, accordingly, the shepherds and herdsmen post themselves. Trenches are hastily dug, the flying particles are carefully extinguished as they fall, and sometimes the attempt to stop the course of such a conflagration is attended with success. Often, however, the attempt fails, and the despairing husbandmen see one wheat-field after another in a blaze, their dwellings reduced to ashes, and the affrighted cattle scouring away over the plain before the advancing volumes of smoke.

The course of one of these steppen-fires is often most capricious. It will leave a tract of country uninjured, and travel on for eight or ten days into the interior, and the farmer whose land has been left untouched, will begin to flatter himself with the belief that his corn and his cattle are safe; but all at once the foe returns with renewed vigour, and the scattered farm-houses, with the ricks of hay and corn grouped in disorder around, fall a prey to the remorseless destroyer. The farmer, however, is not without his consolation on these occasions. The ashes of the herbage form an excellent manure for the ground, and the next crops invariably repay a portion of his loss. Indeed, so beneficial is the effect, that many of the large proprietors subject their land regularly every four or five years to the process of burning; but this operation is then performed with much caution, wide trenches being first dug around the space within which it is intended that the fire should remain confined.

To the same process likewise are subjected the forests of reeds by which all the rivers of the steppe are fringed, but this is deemed so dangerous, that the law imposes banishment to Siberia as the penalty for the offence. Nevertheless, there are few places where the reeds are not regularly burnt away each returning spring, at which season, during the night, the Dnieper and Dniester appear to be converted into rivers of fire. There are two motives for setting light to the reeds, and these motives are powerful enough completely to neutralise the dread of Siberia: in the first place, the reeds serve as a cover to multitudes of wolves, which, when driven by the fire either into the water or into the open plain, are easily destroyed by their remorseless enemies, the shepherds and herdsmen. The second motive is, the hope of obtaining a better supply of young reeds, by destroying the old ones. The reeds, it must be borne in mind, are of great value in the steppe, where, in the absence of timber and stones, they form the chief material for building.

THE AMERICAN EAGLE.

BY CHARLES WEST THOMPSON.

Bird of the heavens! whose matchless eye
Alone can front the blaze of day,
And, wandering through the radiant sky,
Ne'er from the sunlight turns away.
Whose ample wing was made to rise
Majestic o'er the loftiest peak,
On whose chill top the winter skies
Around thy nest, in tempests speak,
What ranger of the winds can dare,
Proud mountain king! with thee compare,
Or lift his gaudier plumes on high
Before thy native majesty,
When thou hast ta'en thy seat alone,
Upon thy cloud-encircled throne?

Bird of the cliffs! thy noble form
Might well be thought almost divine;
Born for the thunder and the storm,
The mountain and the rock are thine;
And there, where never foot has been,
Thy eyry is sublimely hung,
Where low'ring skies their wrath begin,
And loudest lullabies are sung
By the fierce spirit of the blast
When, his snow mantle o'er him cast,
He sweeps across the mountain top,
With a dark fury nought can stop,
And wings his wild, uncertain way
Far through the clouded realms of day.

Bird of the sun! to thee—to thee
The earliest tints of dawn are known,
And 'tis thy proud delight to see
The monarch mount his gorgeous throne,
Throwing the crimson drapery by,
That half impedes his glorious way,
And mounting up the radiant sky,
E'en what he is—the king of day!
Before the regent of the skies
Men shrink, and veil their dazzled eyes;
But thou, in royal majesty,
Hast kingly rank as well as he,
And with a steady, dauntless gaze,
Thou meet'st the splendour of his blaze.

Bird of Columbia! well art thou
An emblem of our native land;
With unblench'd front and noble brow,
Among the nations doom'd to stand;
Proud, like her mighty mountain woods;
Like her own rivers, wandering free;
And sending forth from hills and floods
The joyous shout of liberty!
Like thee, majestic bird! like thee,
She stands in unbought majesty,
With spreading wing, untired and strong,
That dares a soaring far and long,
That mounts aloft, nor looks below,
And will not quail though tempests blow.

The admiration of the earth,
In grand simplicity she stands;
Like thee, the storms beheld her birth,
And she was nursed by rugged hands;
But, past the fierce and furious war,
Her rising fame new glory brings,
For kings and nobles come from far
To seek the shelter of her wings.
And like thee, rider of the cloud;
She mounts the heavens, serene and proud,
Great in a pure and noble fame,
Great in her spotless champion's name,
And destined in her day to be
Mighty as Rome—more nobly free.

My native land! my native land!
To whom my thoughts will fondly turn;
For her the warmest hopes expand,
For her the heart with fears will yearn.
Oh! may she keep her eye, like thee,
Proud eagle of the rocky wild,
Fix'd on the sun of liberty,
By rank, by faction unbeguiled;
Remembering still the rugged road
Our venerated fathers trod,
When they through toil and danger prest,
To gain their glorious bequest,
And from each lip the caution fell
To those who follow'd, "guard it well."

Long on each mountain's sun-crown'd height,
And o'er each forest's shadowy dell,
May freedom's banner meet the sight,
And freedom's psean loudly swell—
Till every valley round about,
And every stream that wanders free,
Shall echo back the glorious shout,
"This is the land of liberty!"
Long may her happiness be found
Based on that firm and holy ground,
And, like her population's sweep,
Still spread abroad from deep to deep—
Where day declines, where morning springs,
The eagle stretches out her wings.

The home of the literary character should be the abode of repose and of silence. There must he look for the feasts of study, in progressive and alternate labours; a taste "which," says Gibbon, "I would not exchange for the treasures of India."
—*D'Israeli, Literary Character.*

PUBLIC GRUMBLERS.—We are always discontented. We are fond of complaining whetever we happen to be. We constantly cry out against some person or some thing. We say, what a nation! What a climate! What weather! What a life! [What bad times!] Does this proceed from that natural uneasiness which we generally feel, or from self-love? Perhaps from both. We are well only where we are not, and we want to persuade ourselves that we are better than those by whom we are surrounded. We regret the past, because we dislike the present. We see the good side of whatever is gone by, and only the bad one of what is present.—*De Ligne.*

To judge a book well, we ought not to know its author. If we do, it is next to an impossibility not to be prepared to be either for or against him. If the gravest treatise of morals be written by a man of a lively disposition we say beforehand: "I lay there will be a thousand follies." We read the work in a laughing mood, and every deep or new thought is likely to appear an extravagance. —*De Ligne.*

Abstract, or general propositions, though never so true, appear obscure or doubtful to us very often till they are explained by examples; when examples are pointed out to us, there is a kind of appeal, with which we are flattered, made to our senses, as well as to our understandings. The instruction comes then from our authority; we yield to fact when we resist speculation.—*Lord Bolingbroke.*

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